Return to the

1st Hughes Will Called A Forgery

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The first purported will of Howard Hughes was pronounced a forgery yesterday by a handwriting expert hired by Summa Corp., which operates the late billionaire's properties.

Meanwhile, a clue to the actual author has been found, the Los Angeles Times was told by a source close to the investigation of the document's mysterious origin. There was no elaboration on the nature of the clue.

Lyndal Shaneyfelt of Alexandria, Va., Summa's expert, examined the so-called Mormon will Monday and yesterday in Las Vegas and said it was "a good forgery as forgeries go."

The official sponsor of the will, ex-Hughes aide Noah Dietrich of Los Angeles, is preparing for a new examination of the document tomorrow. Dietrich may then decide whether to withdraw the document from probate.

Dietrich was named executor in the purported 1968 will, which turned up April 27 in Mormon Church headquarters in Salt Lake City.

A surprise beneficiary of a one-sixteenth share under the alleged will was a Utah gasoline station operator, Melvin Dummar. Dummar explained his good fortune by saying he was driving in the Nevada desert and picked up a ragged, bleeding man who later said he was Hughes.

Shaneyfelt — who worked for the FBI from 1940 to 1975 — told reporters he compared the document with a sample of Dummar's handwriting and his examination was inconclusive.

In comparing the document with samples of court-accepted Hughes writing, the handwriting analyst said, he observed that the key to the forgery was the line quality in the purported will. He added that the writing was shaky, probably because the forger wrote slowly.

Clark County officials indicated that the first will was the only one of about 15 that is being considered seriously.

Possible withdrawal of the document has been under consideration, Dietrich's attorney, Harold Rhoden, said, since Rhoden got a "second opinion" from another expert, Charles Sachs, last Friday. Sachs, of Los Angeles, said the document probably was not authentic.

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